PERCENT OF NEWBORNS SCREENED FOR METABOLIC DISORDERS

Objective

By 1990, virtually all newborns should be provided neonatal screening for metabolic disorders for which effective and efficient tests and treatments are available [for example, phenylketonuria (PKU) and congenital hypothyroidism].

Explanatory Notes

In 1985, all 50 states and D.C. had newborn screening programs that included at a minimum PKU and hypothyroidism. However, not every state enforces the testing, and detailed data for the percent of neonates screened are not available for every state. (3)

North Carolina does not have a mandatory state testing law, but infants born in hospitals are routinely screened for PKU and hypothyroidism. Since July 1987, nonwhite newborns have been screened for sickle cell, and screening for galactosemia is expected to become statewide in the early months of 1988.

Prior to data year 1985, first tests of newborns are not distinguishable from repeat tests; therefore, the percent of newborns screened in earlier years is indeterminable. The 1985 and 1986 percentages relate tests for infants born in N.C. to births occurring in N.C.

Findings

In North Carolina, the percentage of newborns screened was 94.1 in 1985 and 97.8 in 1986. Reasons for the difference in these rates are unknown.

Although the goal of "virtually all" cannot be claimed, North Carolina's 1986 screening rate was high, especially considering the absence of a mandatory testing law. One reason undoubtedly is physician concerns about liability for failure to diagnose an affected infant.

Data Sources

North Carolina: State Center for Health Statistics
United States: National Center for Health Statistics